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Media Influence in Urban Government

Dennis Samuel Elder
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

MEDIA INFLUENCE IN URBAN GOVERNMENT

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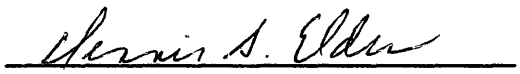

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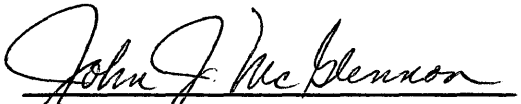

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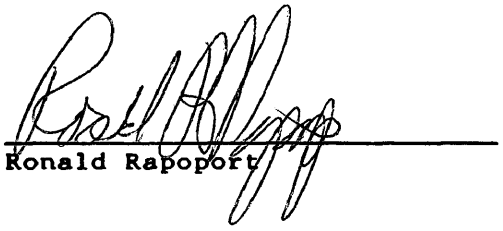

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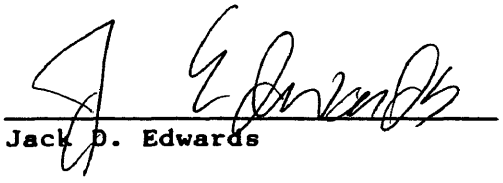

Jack D. Edwards

DEDICATION

To Patty and the girls, Mollie, Amber, and Susan.

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ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank professors John McGlennon and Ronald Rapoport for providing the guidance, encouragement, and criticism that made this investigation possible.

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ABSTRACT

Most studies of media influence have focused on how the reporting of news affects the opinions and concerns of the public at-large. A few, however, have looked at the other side of the coin: the impact of the media on the people who are in the news, the politicians and officials who run the nation. These observers have found that the give-and-take between reporter and policy maker has an effect independent of, and perhaps regardless of, the ability of news reports to sway the masses.

This study begins with a model of media influence developed in studies of federal and state government and attempts to extend that model to local government. The power of the media is hypothesized to flow from four resources: its ability to focus attention on certain issues, people, and attributes; its ability to inform policy makers about public opinion, the world outside of government, and events and people within government; its ability to provide officials with a channel to solicit support for policies, people, and institutions; and its comment on the performance of policy makers.

Interviews with administrators, council members, and planning commissioners from two Virginia cities revealed that the model is only partially applicable to local government. The media does to some extent control the local agenda and is the primary means by which officials communicate with the public. But policy makers are not dependent on the media for information, nor do they place much importance on media comment.

Several factors explain the reduced role of the media. First, and probably most importantly, city government is much less complex than federal or even state government. City officials don't need the media to feel the pulse of the community or keep up with happenings in their own departments or other areas of government. Also, the city media face certain constraints that, although not unique to their situation, are not as binding on the media covering state and federal government. City media have less motivation, due to less competition and less public interest; they have fewer resources; and they have more immediate economic conflicts.

MEDIA INFLUENCE IN URBAN GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

In a meeting room sit several dozen persons, all involved in some way in the workings of a city government. Behind the table, members of the City Council swivel in their chairs, debating and deciding issues. A city manager directs the action, while his lieutenants offer proposals and expertise. A reporter sits at the press table, scribbling and listening. A television camera flicks on bright lights as the debate heats up. The representatives of the city's newspapers and television stations take no part in the proceedings. They have no vote, no spot on the agenda. Yet, it is likely some of the speeches and much of the dramatics are for their benefit.

In one view of the situation, the reporter is merely a neutral observer. His reports will mirror reality and keep the citizenry informed. It hardly seems a powerful role. But many say that the reporters and the media institutions they represent are key actors in the decision-making process. Some believe their influence is too great. Russian exile Alexander Solzhenitsyn, commenting on the plight of the United States and West European democracies, said, "The press has become the greatest power within Western countries, more powerful than the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary." (1)

Social scientists have devoted numerous hours to the study of the media and its effects on politics and government. The findings frequently have been contradictory. Research has concentrated on the role of the media in national government, particularly elections, and only occasionally examined its influence on state and local policy making. My study is on the interaction of elected, appointed, and administrative officials in city government with the media. By reviewing prior writings on decision-making in cities and through a telephone poll of officials in Virginia's two largest cities, I have examined how well conclusions reached in studies of national and state governments apply at the local level.

Before I begin a review of literature on media influence in general, and the media's role in policy making in particular, I would first like to make one note about terminology. Most of the research cited speaks of the relation between government and the "press." The term is sometimes used to describe reporters from both the print and broadcast media; sometimes, just newspapers and magazines. In this paper, I use the term "mass media," or simply "media," to apply to both print and broadcast communications. I have not attempted to differentiate between effects caused by the two.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "The Exhausted West," Harvard Magazine 80 (July-August 1978): 23.

CHAPTER I

THE EFFECTS OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

There has never been a lack of observers to attest to the power of the media. "The pen," we all know, "is mightier than the sword." Traditionally, the mass media has been characterized as a potent shaper of public opinion. Yet, when researchers began to examine the equation in the 1940s and '50s, they found little empirical evidence to support the popular concept. Summing the two decades of work, Joseph Klapper concluded in 1960 that the media has little power to change attitudes and serves primarily to reinforce existing beliefs. "Mass communications ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences," he wrote. (1) Or, in the words of Bernard Berelson, "some kinds of communications on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects." (2) The precise effects of the mass media, they believed, depended on the interaction of a wide range of variables.

This view, sometimes called the law of minimal consequences, held that the effectiveness of a message was greatly reduced by the selective behavior of the audience. Through "cognitive

dissonance," an individual choses from the flow of mass communications those items that support and reinforce his views, while avoiding anything that would shake his convictions. Thus the media can reinforce, but rarely convert.

The early researchers did concede some influence to the media. They found it highly efficient in imparting facts. They also reasoned that the media should be capable of creating opinions on new issues because, if the audience is not predisposed, it would not be selective in receiving messages. Particularly during times of revolution or social unrest, the media may have enormous influence, Klapper said. "Opportunties exist, at such a time, not only for the reinforcement of revolutionary ideas, but also for the introduction or definition of issues to which many audience members have given little or no attention." (3)

Klapper wondered if the media might have extensive influence on society, not through mass opinion, but through its impact on elites. He warned against "the tendency to go overboard in blindly minimizing the effect and potentialities of mass communications." (4)

By the late 1960s and early '70s, researchers had begun to move away from the minimalist view and toward a concept of a powerful media. The landmark study was published by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972. Examining the 1968 Presidential campaign, they found a strong relationship between the emphasis placed on issues by the media and the judgment of voters

as to which issues are important. "The media appears to have exerted a considerable impact on voters' judgment of what they considered the major issues of the campaign," they wrote. (5)

This agenda-setting theory holds that the most important aspect of the media is "its ability to mentally order and organize the world for us." (6) The priorities of the media become the priorities of the public. "Each day editors and news directors -- the gatekeepers in the news media systems -- must decide which items to pass and which to reject. Furthermore, the items passed through the gate are not treated equally when presented to the audience." (7)

The research of the 1940s and '50s had concentrated on the media's effects on attitudes. Agenda-setting theories hold that the limited scope of those studies yielded limited results. Agenda-setting takes into account the cognitive effects of mass communications, that is, the media's impact on attention, awareness and information. While "attitudes" involve feelings of being for or against a political position or figure, "cognitions" concern knowledge and beliefs about political objects. (8) The debate continues on whether these cognitive effects are linked to behavior, and if so, how effectively.

Also calling for a return to the concept of a powerful media was Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, a German public opinion expert. She argued that certain conditions create an unrealistic consonance, or sameness, in news reports. For example, newspapers tend to depend

on common sources, such as the wire services. Reporters follow each others' lead, intensively studying the work of rival publications and broadcasters. Common criteria guide styles of reporting and news values. This consonance, teamed with the omnipresence of media messages and the cumulative effect of those messages, is such that an individual has difficulty forming an independent opinion, she said. (9)

John P. Robinson studied the 1968 Presidential election and concluded that a newspaper's perceived support of a candidate contributed to the candidate's margin of victory. (10) The finding was replicated in a study of the 1972 election. (11)

Other research focused on the media's role in socialization. Klapper had treated the media as a secondary socializing agent. More recent research has shown that the media plays a more central role in socialization, particularly in the development of children's political attitudes. (12)

Research also examined the media's interaction with elites. A 1983 study concentrated on "muckracking," or investigative reporting. Under the traditional "hypodermic" model, a newspaper's investigation starts with a journalist working in secrecy to uncover a problem. He collects data and airs his report. The public is aroused and demands action from government to right the wrong. Decision makers respond to public pressure.

Studying the making of an NBC documentary on home health care, the researchers concluded that the report was an "active

collaboration" between reporters and policy makers, the former working for professional benefit and the later for political gain. Policy makers were involved long before the report aired. Before the public became aware of the problem, public hearings had been scheduled and discussions had begun that would lead to a policy change. In short, collaboration between reporters and officials had cut the public out of the process. The collaboration itself had produced the policy outcome. (13)

Summary

Thus, the view of minimal consequences has given way to theories ascribing the media considerable influence. The research of the post-World War period identified selective perception as a block to the media's ability to shape opinions. Agenda-setting theories concede this limitation but argue that the the media determine which issues become public concerns. Other writers noted the consonance and omnipresence of media messages, the media's role in socialization and the media's interaction with elites.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communications (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960) 8.

2. Bernard Berelson, "Communications and Public Opinion," Communications in Modern Society, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana, Ill.: U of Illinois P, 1948) 172.

3. Klapper 58-59.

4. Klapper 252.

5. Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," Public Opinion Quarterly 36 (1972): 180.

6. McCombs and Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press," Enduring Issues IN Mass Communications, ed. Everette E. Dennis, Arnold H. Ismach, and Donald M. Gillmor (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing, 1978) 97.

7. McCombs and Shaw 100.

8. McCombs and Shaw 97-98.

9. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Return to the Concept of Powerful Mass Media," in Dennis, Ismach, and Gillmor, 65-76.

10. John P. Robinson, "Perceived Media Bias and the 1968 Election: Can the Media Affect Behavior After All?" Journalism Quarterly 49 (1972): 245.

11. Robinson, "The Press as King-Maker: What Surveys from the Last Five Campaigns Show," Journalism Quarterly 51 (1974): 587-94, 606.

12. Among the many studies are M. Margaret Conway, et. al, "The News Media in Children's Political Socialization," Public Opinion Quarterly 45 (1981): 164-78; and Alexis S. Tan, "Mass Media Use, Issue Knowledge, and Political Involvement," Public Opinion Quarterly 44 (1980): 241-48.

13. Faye Lomax Cook, et. al, "Media and Agenda Setting," Public Opinion Quarterly 47 (1983): 16-35.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPACT ON POLICY MAKING

The NBC documentary study showed that the media does not have to change public opinion or cause on outcry from the citizenry to affect policy making. As Klapper speculated, the media may influence policy through its effects on decision makers themselves.

Delmer D. Dunn took an extensive look at the interplay between reporters and officials of Wisconsin's state government in a study published in 1969. Dunn drew upon that research and previous studies of the media's influence at the federal level to develop a theory of media influence. He claimed that the media has four "resources" that allow it to affect decision making. These are, first, its ability to focus attention; second, its ability to provide information to decision makers; third, its ability to provide decision makers with a means to inform the public; and finally, its commentary on officials' performance. (1)

Focusing attention

The media, Bernard Cohen wrote in 1963, "might not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about." (2) The editor, as he judges what his readers need and

want to see, puts a claim on their attention. He determines much of what they will be thinking and talking about.

This concept, that the media has the power to focus attention on certain issues and ignore others, is part of what McCombs and Shaw would later call agenda-setting. The media not only sets the agenda for the public at-large, it also orders and organizes reality for policy makers.

Writing more than 20 years after Cohen, Martin Linsky reaffirms the media's ability to set officials' agendas. In his 1986 study of federal policy making, he found that many senior officials believe that the media is better able than they to control the public agenda. Linsky polled 483 persons who held or had held senior positions in the executive and legislative branches during the past 20 years. Of these, 63 percent said the media initiated more than half the stories that dealt with their office or agency; almost half (46 percent) said they initiated less than a quarter of such stories. More than a third, 35.8 percent, said the media played a very important role in identifying problems for policy makers.

Officials accept the media's agenda because "what becomes a high priority issue for the media may be a reflection of what the people are thinking about," Linsky writes. He quotes an official who says, "Editors have a very keen sense of what their readers are concerned about, and readers read what their editors are concerned about." (3)

Dunn found also that public officials often equate media attention with public interest. "If the public becomes interested (even if only in the perceptions of policy makers), the problem becomes more pressing." (4) The official has limited time to devote to a limited number of matters. It is significant what is placed on his agenda, for those matters will receive the government's attention. It is significant what is left out, because a lack of action usually preserves the status quo.

"Whether in anticipation of or in reaction to bad news, officials feel the need to act," Leon V. Sigal observed. "The realization that a mess will be spread across page one in the near future compels them to clean it up -- or at least cover it over and divert attention elsewhere." (5)

Also, the routines involved in dealing with the media can affect policy making. Press briefings and handouts entail commitments of government authority and invoke formal proceedings. When policies are announced, such as in a State of the Union address, commitments are made. In the process of drafting such a statement, policy makers start in motion the machinery that leads to a policy outcome. (6)

The media may elicit "commitments" from reluctant officials. Donald R. Matthews related how a news reporter launched a Congressional investigation. The reporter quizzed the new chairman of the Senate Banking and Currency Committee about the committee's plans in the next session. "Will the committee look into the

recent rise in stock market prices?" the reporter asked. The senator answered that, yes, it probably would. The next day a headline said the committee planned to investigate the stock market boom, all but assuring that the committee would have to devote some attention to the matter. (7)

Media attention may open the policy making process to more actors. Normally, decision makers consult closely with those they believe will be most directly affected by a decision. Participants are normally limited to those who have previously demonstrated that they speak for the interests involved. "When the press makes the issue visible, it intervenes in this process by alerting additional groups and decision makers to their stake in the outcome. By enlarging the scope of the conflict in this way, the press can affect the outcome of the issue." (8) Of course, it may be policy makers themselves who are using the media to alert certain groups, but I will discuss that later.

What news the media chooses to use and emphasize can affect the public's image of the political world, including the officials and agencies in it. It can create stereotypes. One study of how the media covers racial issues classified roughly half of all news about blacks prior to 1940 as stereotypical. The stories involved blacks in antisocial behavior, sensational events, and entertainment. Thus, it is not surprising that the white public, which had little face-to-face, routine contact with blacks, thought of blacks most often in those terms. By 1965-66, this type of

stereotypical news had dropped to 17 percent of the total, with civil rights news rising to 46 percent and news of interracial violence increasing to 19 percent. While this trend may have helped erase the earlier stereotypes, it unfortunately also served to create new ones. (9)

In this same manner, what the media chooses to disseminate about policy makers and public agencies can affect their images. Consider this scenario: A major prison outbreak alarms the public. Various news organizations, sensing an interest among their audience members, respond by reporting on and giving better play to other stories about escapes of prisoners. A breakout that was too minor for yesterday's news goes on page one today. From this, the public perceives that there is an epidemic of outbreaks. Citizens sense that there are problems with the corrections system and call for improvements. Actually, there may be no more escapes than normal; more are just being reported.

What the media covers and emphasizes, some argue, is not a true reflection of reality. A journalist's criteria for determining newsworthiness demand that a story be easy to understand, readily linked to prominent individuals, and intrinsically interesting. Critics say the media emphasize conflict and negative events. News from outside one's culture is viewed from a narrow, parochial perspective. (10)

Informing policy makers

Most senators are avid newspaper readers, Matthews found. They peruse the Washington and New York dailies along with leading papers from their home state. They borrow themes from prominent columnists for their speeches and enter articles and editorials in the Congressional Record for their colleagues edification. (11) Cohen found that, despite widespread disdain for the media, State Department officials are also faithful newspaper readers. (12) Some 58 percent of Wisconsin policy makers claimed to read four or five newspapers each day. (13)

While it is obvious that these officials would turn to the media to learn about the outside world, what is not so well-known is that policy makers depend on the media to find out what is going on in their own backyards. "It is ironic, but still true, that the members of so small a legislative body (the Senate) should find it necessary to communicate with each other via public print, but often they do," Mathews said of the U.S. Senate. (14) Cohen observed the same phenomenon in the House of Representatives. Congressmen and senators see newspapers as "a convenient and economical substitute for the heavy investment required to read Congressional studies, reports, and hearings," he wrote. (15) They turn to newspapers to find, in plain English, just what the substantive content of proposals are.

For the foreign policy specialists, the media provides an

independent and more rapid view of what is happening in their areas of interest. However, since the internal flow of specialized material is great, the media's contribution to their work is proportionally less, Cohen said. (16)

Almost of third of the officials interviewed for Linsky's 1986 study said they relied very much on the media for information about developments within their policy area. Another 38.8 percent said they relied on the media somewhat, while 30.4 percent said they relied very little. (17)

State policy makers, particularly legislative leaders, depend on the media for information within their own governmental units. Fifty-eight percent of legislative leaders mentioned this among the factual information they receive from the media. (18)

Newspapers and television are also useful sources of information about other branches of government. Cohen found that State Department officials "turn to the press for information about things that are happening and proposals that are being considered elsewhere in the foreign policy structure of government." (19) The media serve "foreign policy makers in both the executive and legislative branches as a basic, standard source of factual information about foreign affairs and also political developments within the American government that are relevant to foreign policy." (20) This too is supported by Linsky's study. Slightly more than half of the officials he surveyed said they relied on the media very much or somewhat for information about government

outside their policy area. (21)

Policy makers turn to the media for a measure of public opinion. Editorials, columns, and news stories containing the reactions of other officials, private individuals, and groups provide policy makers with a channel for tapping public opinion. To be certain, there are other ways to measure public sentiment, "but lacking any other daily link to the outside, any other daily measure of how people are reacting to the ebb and flow of foreign policy developments, the policy maker reaches for the newspaper as an important source of public opinion, as the instrument of 'feedback.' " (22) The media provides "a quick reading of the public mind" for policy makers who have difficulty ascertaining public opinion on a given issue. "As a consequence, the press not only shapes and represents public opinion but also is public opinion in the eyes of officials." (23) The use of opinions found in the media, Cohen found, varies from "total rejection (after careful reading!)" to "a view that at times department policy is fashioned in direct response to press opinion." (24)

(The concept of public opinion also affects policy makers' relationship with reporters. "Journalists have a vested interest in public opinion as a symbol. The symbol gives journalists leaverage, presumably by making officials and others more willing to answer questions.") (25)

The media brings to the attention of policy makers events and people that might otherwise be overlooked. Linsky found that 81.2

percent of officials said a group or individual that captured media attention magnified its influence, while 67.8 percent said the group or individual would gain the notice of higher level officials due to that exposure. (26)

Transmitting information

Political actors, through the media and other channels, seek to shape each other's perceptions of events and issues. "Like a Pirandello play, much of politics consists of conflict among actors, each of whom seeks to gain acceptance for his own definition of reality, his own version of the facts." (27)

Three-quarters of the senior officials in Linsky's survey said they try to seek or influence news coverage of their agency. Almost all believe they are successful at least sometimes. (28)

Cohen identifies three general reasons why policy makers distribute information to the media. They do so, first, for ideological reasons; second, to promote policies, institutions, and individuals; and finally, to test public reactions. (29) Dunn established a similar typography. (30)

Ideological considerations, sounding the most noble, may be the least important. But some officials do release information because they feel the public has a right to know, or because they believe an informed public is essential to democratic government. However, such information is likely to be routine and peripheral to policy matters.

A more common motivation is promotion of a certain policy or program. The media provides a means of selling ideas to the public and building support. If a policy maker favors a new weapons system, he may feed reporters a story about a breakthrough in technology by a rival nation that makes the system vital. Another policy maker, opposing the same system, may tell the media that problems have been found with the system or that another piece of equipment will do the job better.

Sigal outlined several other maneuvers policy makers in Washington employ. For example, senior officials seek the President's endorsement for their programs "to invoke his name in order to persuade reluctant colleagues to go along." (31) Proponents of a program might lobby for certain language in a presidential speech, then see to it in briefings with reporters that the comment is not ignored.

Another tactic is for a subordinate to make public certain information that makes it harder for his boss not to act. Upon becoming ambassador in Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge started leaking stories about problems in Diem's regime. His purpose was to push Diem into instituting reform and prod Washington into withholding support if the dictator remained unmoved. (32)

Policy makers can use the media to get more people involved, whether they be supporters or critics. "What observers may mistake for a trial balloon is frequently a premature disclosure of a policy option -- or a deliberately distorted version of it --

designed to kill it off by arousing opponents before the arguments in its favor are fully articulated or its potential supporters mobilized." (33)

Policy makers may also use the media to promote their institutions, hoping to create a positive image favorable to existing and future policies. Or, they may seek personal publicity, hoping to develop political clout. One way a policy maker can create a favorable image is through the manipulation of symbols. The office holder who visits a disaster scene can do little to relieve suffering but can demonstrate empathy with the victims. Officials can speak of their "concern" over poor conditions, even when they have no solution to offer.

Finally, policy makers may release information to test public reactions. This is commonly through a "trial ballon," that is, a report that a certain program is being seriously considered when actually policy makers have yet to commit themselves. If the proposal draws too much criticism, little else may be heard of it. Another means of testing reactions is to announce that a commission has been created to study or hear comments on a matter.

Because it is the media that controls the information channels and not the officials, policy makers may have to modify their behavior to get the publicity they seek. "Before an official can make news, he must both meet the reporters' news definition and utilize some method which brings him to their attention," Dunn observed. (34)

Matthews found the behavior of senators shaped by their perceptions' of reporters' news values. "In order to survive, most senators must make "news" by the reporters' definition of the term," he wrote. (35)

Reporters' news values favor some officials at the expense of others. The president, and to a lesser degree, governors and mayors, have little problem getting exposure. The president is the "outstanding news source," wrote Elmer E. Cornwell Jr. "News about him and his activities combine government information with human interest . . . Congress, the courts, and the departments are essentially dehumanized abstractions, whose actions are as newsworthy as the President's, but whose human interest can rarely be isolated or identified." (36)

News values can also favor certain policies. For example, military spending, with "its marching troops, long lines of tanks, and low sweeping planes," has a much greater publicity appeal than economic aid to Third World countries, which "requires tremendous exertion to seek out its newsworthy traits, vast oversimplification, and the mammouth efforts of private groups who zealously exploit the small news potential in order to develop political support." (37)

Officials have many ways to give information to reporters. There are press releases, press briefings, and press conferences. Speeches are made; tours are held. Reporters consistently cover board meetings, thus giving officials a forum to make

announcements, launch programs, and take stands. Officials and reporters talk on the record and off. The policy maker may leak tidbits or give broad background briefings.

Linsky found that 41.9 percent of the officials he surveyed had leaked information to the media. " . . . Those that admitted leaking most often leaked for policy-related reasons of putting items on the agenda or sending a message to those outside of government," he writes. About three-quarters of the leakers said they had done so to counter misleading information. Almost as many said they had leaked to gain attention for an issue or policy option. Other reasons were to consolidate public support (63.6 percent), force action on an issue (52.7 percent), develop good relations with the media (39.7 percent), send a message to another branch of government (32.8 percent), stop action on an issue (31.5 percent), lauch a trial balloon (30.4 percent), and protect one's position (30.4 percent). (38)

Cohen believed State Department officials were in a position to exert considerable influence over the flow of news. The rules of the reporter's craft, those that require impersonal and objective reporting, give policy makers the power to say what has or has not been happening on a particular day. But, because policy makers avoid publicity and like to play their cards close to the chest, the initiative is passed back to reporters. "The staple in the diet of the foreign affairs correspondent consists not of the dishes they are offered but rather the bones they manage to dig up

for themselves," he wrote. (39) Because reporters are likely to ask questions based on yesterday's news stories, coverage is less than thorough or comprehensive. The impact of the few people in government active in "making news" is enhanced. (40)

Keeping information out of the news can be as important as getting it in. The less said about social problems, the easier it is to divert attention and resources elsewhere. In the 1950s and early 1960s, black protesters gained considerable news exposure. The broadcasts of their demonstrations, often marred by violent reprisals from Southern whites, made segregation a problem that could no longer be ignored by Northern politicians and middle class whites. Publicity also attracted donations and followers to the movement. Opponents of black civil rights were not blind to these effects; in many cities, local authorities strived to keep accounts of sit-ins and other demonstrations out of the media. This same rationale can be seen in the current restrictions on reporting of unrest imposed by the rulers of South Africa.

Officials have other reasons for avoiding media coverage as well. In the field of foreign policy, negotiators strive to keep their bargaining positions under wraps and sensitive issues out of the spotlight. Congressional committees meet in closed sessions because representatives are unlikely to speak freely with reporters around. "In many cases, the wheeling-dealing, the tradeoffs, the manipulation of the process or the candid explanation of a bill's passage or demise are matters which congressmen would prefer not to

have reported." (41)

Commenting about performance

A fourth resource of the media, according to Dunn, is its ability to comment on the performance of policy makers. Officials use the media to determine the success of their activities. "A policy maker very often judges the success of an endeavor by the extent to which it generates press comment and by the extent to which that comment makes him look good." (42)

Officials like to read about themselves, and they like to see the reaction of others to their proposals and activities. The media's critique, Dunn argued, encourages policy makers to act in ways that the media perceive as favorable. (43)

The media also provides ideas, analysis, and interpretation. It is a "steady and somewhat fertile source of policy analysis and ideas, affecting even people who claim to be unaffected by it." (44) Legislators, more so than executives, are suspectible to the suggestions of prominent columnists, Cohen found. (45)

Media comment is detrimental to officials when reporters allege that policy makers acted improperly. Dunn found that Wisconsin officials believed the media had a responsibility to protect the public interest by guarding against corruption, special interests, and lax performance. "They think an official tempted to pilfer from the public coffers will think twice before submitting to his temptations, because public disclosures by the press would

bring personal embarrassment as well as serious political consequences." (46)

Linsky found that negative stories have a substantial impact on policy makers. More than half the officials said negative coverage decreased their chances of attaining policy goals, made action on an issue more difficult, and undermined outside support. Slightly less than half said negative coverage caused them to reassess their position on the issue involved, increased the importance of the issue within the bureaucracy, and moved responsibility for the issue higher within the bureacracy. (47)

The way the media characterizes, or "frames," an issue can be very significant. "If the press characterizes a policy option one way early on in the decision-making process, it is very difficult for officials to turn that image around to their preferred perspective," Linsky writes. (48) For example, the continuing characterization of the neutron bomb as a weapon that "kills people and leaves buildings standing" made its acceptance much more difficult. For the same reason, President Reagan has protested the nickname reporters chose for his Strategic Defense Initiative, arguing that "Star Wars" has negative connotations.

The impact overall

Cohen concluded some 20 years ago that the media has considerable influence. "The press itself is such an important institution in the policy making network that any pattern of press

coverage would leave a substantial mark of one kind or another on the participants and thus on the process," he wrote. (49)

The media, he believed, helped create "common understandings or interpretations of political reality." (50) Decision makers in various branches of government could draw on this common source of knowledge to discuss policy.

He believed, however, that the pattern of foreign affairs coverage poorly served the interests of those involved. "Although drawing issues to the forefront of foreign policy attention, the press -- in its choice of issues and treatment of them -- at best contributes only randomly to intelligent policy making in the democratic context; and at worst is destructive of coherence and planning in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives." (51)

If anything, the media's influence on policy makers has increased since Cohen made his observations. "The roles of reporters and officials increasingly seem inextricably intertwined, like different colored strands in a single ball of thread," writes Linsky. (52) He found that officials of the 1980s spend much more time dealing with the media than their predecessors of the 1960s and early 1970s. The more recently officials were in office, the more likely they are to perceive the media as having a dominant effect on policy making. Of the entire sample, only 0.2 percent said the media has no effect on federal policy. Most say it has some effect (40 percent) or substantial effect (49 percent), while 7.5 percent say it dominates policy making.

The greatest change has been television's assumption of a central role. Three effects related to the rise of television, according to Linsky, are that more issues tend to be oversimplified, some stories become a national concern that would not have otherwise, and the policy making process is accelerated. (53)

In Dunn's view, the media provides a link between the policy maker and his larger political environment. The media's impact is greatest when policy is new or changing, he wrote. When a policy maker confronts a new issue, he has yet to develop sources of information, thus he must rely on the media. The policy maker has little first hand experience and must turn to the media for his frame of reference. Also, when issues are new, the policy maker is more sensitive to public opinion. (54)

Relationships with the media vary according to the branch of government. Elected executives and their staff emphasize the media as an informer of the public, since they are most often trying to sell the chief executive's programs. They also find it easier to make news because, as we have noted, the president or governor is a better news source. Legislative officials have a personal, informal, and more frequent interaction with reporters. They rely heavily on the media for factual information. Appointed administrators viewed the media in less personal terms. They use the media more than executives or legislators to find out what is going on in other branches of government. (55)

Linsky found a similar relationship between members of Congress and the media. Officials in Congress need to let their constituents know what they're doing, learn of opinion back home, and, if they desire higher office, gain a national reputation. Compared to officials in the executive branch, members of Congress rated media influence as greater, but also said they are more able to initiate stories and influence coverage. Unlike executives, ""members of Congress look on the press more as a constant presence to be dealt with and used as a resource than as a force outside their jobs which nevertheless affects their performance." (56)

The view of a powerful media in the policy making arena is not unanimous. The author of a 1978 study questioned Congressional leaders and executives involved in energy policy making about the media's influence and found the perceived impact of the media in that field to be, at most, low to moderate. "There appear to be clear limits to the prevailing notion of widespread media influence in public affairs," the study concluded. (57)

Summary

Dunn identified four resources that contribute to media influence. First, the media can focus the attention of officials on certain issues, individuals, or attributes. This allows the media to help set the public agenda, enlarge the scope of conflicts, and create stereotypes. As many officials equate media attention with public interest, the issues emphasized by the media

are more likely acted on. The media also gain influence by serving as a source of information about public opinion, the world outside of government, and events and people within government. The media provide officials a channel to solicit support for policies, people, and institutions. In striving to influence media messages, officials must interact with reporters and cater to their news values. Finally, the media comment on issues and officials' performance, provide encouragement and ideas, and expose misdeeds and lax performance.

These resources allow the media to shape common understandings of the political world that officials from various departments and in various roles use as they interact. The media also serves as a link between the officials and the world beyond Washington and the state houses.

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CHAPTER III

THE MEDIA AND URBAN POLITICS

Social complexity

Most studies of policy makers and the media have concentrated on the federal government and the Washington press corps. Dunn studied state politics and found the role of the media in policy making at that level to be essentially the same as that at the federal level. But there are some differences, he noted. State officials are better able than their national counterparts to communicate with each other without the media. They have less to remain informed about. In a smaller government, policy makers are more likely to have regular personal contact with each other. Drawn from a small geographic area, they are more likely to have common backgrounds. Many will have served together in lower levels of government.

These differences are not due to level of government per se as much as the size and complexity of government. "As government size increases, then, officials have more to learn about and fewer ways in which they can learn,'' he writes. (1)

Sigal used similar reasoning to help explain differences in the media's role in American policy making as opposed to British. Washington has 50 times as many civil servants as London. American

agencies interact primarily at senior levels, while British departments link through an extensive network of committees and informal, personal relationships. While the British can communicate to a great extent without the media, "the network for circulating information inside the American government is inadequate to the task." (2)

Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin L. DeFleur hypothesize that media influence increases with social complexity. A breakdown in the interpersonal communications network leads to a dependence on media sources. (3) One study in a city of 90,000 persons found that influentials were more dependent on interpersonal communications than the media when dealing with a controversial issue. The city's decision makers had direct access to participants in the controversy, thus had less need to rely on the media. (4)

This "social complexity" theory would lead us to conclude that media influence would be less at the local government level. But there are other factors to consider. As Paul E. Peterson notes, city government is in many ways a different creature from national government. Local power is more limited and dispersed. (5)

Urban studies

Many studies of community power and urban politics have addressed the question of media influence. The media has generally been recognized as one of a group of important actors in the policy

making process -- others being unions, the bureaucracy, officeholders, and business persons. But conclusions have been conflicting and seldom based on empirical research. The role given the media usually depended on the writer's view of the local power structure.

Floyd Hunter, studying Atlanta, found that a fairly autonomous, cohesive minority, drawn primarily from the economically and socially privileged classes, makes most important decisions. (6) Consistent with such a view of the power structure was Hunter's assertion that the media was far removed from the center of power. He placed newspaper columnists and radio commentators on the "third rung" of influence along with petty public officials and civic organization personnel. They were below bank vice presidents and small business owners (second rung), but above ministers, teachers, and small business managers (fourth rung). (7) Long after the actual decision making has taken place, "the newspapers will finally carry stories of the proposals, the ministers will preach sermons, and the associational members will hear speeches regarding plans." (8)

The pluralists, led by Robert Dahl, disputed Hunter's elitist view of community influence and argued that power was dispersed among competing centers. Pluralist theories allowed for much greater influence by the media, which "are not merely contestants in the great game of the city's politics, they are also the principle channel through which all other contestants reach the

general public . . ." (9) However, the pluralists and the researchers that followed them disagreed on just how much clout the media -- primarily newspapers -- actually carried. Norton E. Long thought the media to be "the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with." (10) Edward C. Banfield observed how the Chicago Tribune flexed its muscles to push through construction of an exhibition hall. Motivating the newspaper was both boosterism ("We want to build a bigger Chicago and a bigger Tribune") and a desire to show its influence ("It's good that people should think their newspaper is powerful.") (11) Dahl was skeptical about the media's clout. "The influence of newspapers on politicians depends on belief by politicians in actual or potential influence of newspapers on voters," he wrote. (12)

The observations of the urban specialists draw a picture of media influence that in many ways correlates with the findings on the federal and state level. They also suggest some limits on the power of the media in an urban setting.

Focusing attention

The first resource outlined by Dunn is the media's ability to focus attention on issues and people. Michael Lipskey argued, like Long, that the media is extremely powerful in city politics, able

to grant or withhold publicity, determine what information most people will have on most issues, and what alternatives they will consider in response to issues. Studying protest as a tool for low income groups, he wrote:

> To the extent that successful protest activity depends upon appealing to, and/or threatening, other groups, the communications media set the limits of protest activity. If protest tactics are not considered significant by the media, or if newspapers and television reporters or editors decide to overlook protest tactics, protest organizations will not succeed. Like trees falling unheard in the forest, there is no protest unless protest is perceived and projected. (13)

Edie N. Goldenberg observed that resource-poor groups seek news coverage to gain status and visibility, reinforce attitudes and activate third parties on their behalf. (14) Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman note media coverage tends to make the appointment process for muncipal offices more visible and increases the participants in the process. (15) Media attention, writes Long, essentially nominates the urban elite, "the 'they' who are periodically called upon to solve community problems and meet community crises." (16) Influentials seek publicity through the ritual luncheons, committees, and news releases, keeping score through their news clips. (17)

Providing information

The media's second resource is its ability to provide officials with information. Long states that newspapers furnish

elites "with most of their information about things in general and not a little of inside tidbits about how individual elite members are doing." (18) Sayre and Kaufman felt that newspapers in New York provide a competing source of information, keeping the bureaucracies from having an undisputed monopoly. (19)

The writings of other urban specialists, however, contain little to indicate that city officials are as dependent on the media for information as are their state and federal counterparts. City policy makers do not have to communicate with one another through the media nor do they rely as much on it to determine the pulse of the community. In a study of British regional newspapers, Harvey Cox and David Morgan found a majority of local politicians disregarded the media as a reliable source of fact and opinion. One officeholder viewed it as an insurance policy in case something was missed; another found it a source of useful gossip. (20)

Informing the public

How then does the media perform the third function -- providing policy makers with a means to inform the public and promote their policies? Hunter saw this as the media's role -- mobilizing support for elite decisions. Sayre and Kaufman observe that newspapers give officials a chance to crow about their achievements and otherwise affect public opinion. (21) In a "reformed," non-partisan city government, officials do not have the benefit of a party structure to relay their messages to citizens,

thus must rely more on the media. Karl Bosworth notes the importance of public relations to city managers in particular, who must seek "through news channels and reports to get city accomplishments told to the public." (22)

Lipsky notes that political leaders can defend themselves against the demands of low income groups through the media. Symbolic gestures are made and publicized. Attempts are made to discredit the protesters. The severest problems are treated with greet hoopla, while the bulk of the problem remains unaddressed. (23) Jack Lyle writes of a leader who makes headlines to reach his constituents. "He plays the game of politics with obvious relish and realizes that publicity is one of the tools of the game."

However, the same politician has alternate channels to reach the public, channels that are largely impractical to a leader representing a larger, more dispersed constituency. He sends his messages through other persons with wide personal contacts -- barbers, beauticians, and merchants -- and experiments with a printed newsletter. (24)

Cox and Morgan found leaders dissatisfied with the media's performance in this area. ". . . The stuff of local politics was not adequately communicated to the people." (25)

Commenting on performance

The fourth resource is commenting on performance, praising what is good and exposing what is not. The reform movement of the

early 1900s owes much to the writings of the journalists known as "muckrakers." Working for inexpensive monthly magazines such as Collier's, Cosmopolitan, and McClure's, they documented many of the excesses of machine government and helped push the wave of civic reform. "Exposing corruption of political machines, detailing the stranglehold of the giant corporations, crying shame on the cities where immigrants and blacks were exploited, these journalists roused the middle-class conscience and made reform a mass movement," writes one historian. (26)

Even in the 1950s, Banfield found the fear of the expose gave newspapers had considerable influence in machine cities since the mayor needed to "establish a good opinion both of himself and it (the party) in the outlying wards and the suburbs" where critical votes are beyond the reach of the machine. Harping on the faults of the boss and his machine added to the newspapers' influence, since "in enlarging upon the threat to civic virtue represented by the boss and his henchmen, they enlarge by implication -- and sometimes expressly as well -- upon their own role as guardians of that virtue." (27)

Today, newspapers and television stations probably devote more resources to investigative reporting than ever before. Yet, some observers have questioned the media's performance as a watchdog at the local level. Hampering the media are a number of constraints, limitations that apply most importantly to the fourth resource, but affect all four resources to some extent.

Limits on media influence

The dysjunction between national and local politics in never so evident as in the differing role the news media play," writes Peterson. Hundreds of reporters cover the White House, Congress, and other centers of the federal government. These are the elite of the profession, the specialists capable of in-depth stories. Spurred by competition and backed by news organizations with money to spend, they search for the big story in the most aggressive investigative fashion. The scene at city hall is especially subdued by comparison. Since most large dailies lack competitors, there is less incentive to get the inside story and scrutinize public policy. Covering local government is expensive and, since interest in local politics is low, the returns are few. Most city newspapers won't spend the money to hire a large staff of specialized reporters. And those reporters who excel at the local level soon move on to bigger and better jobs. Finally, city newspapers have a stake in the local economy and are likely to slant toward boosterism rather than muckracking. (28)

The limitations on the urban media may be summed up as, first, a lack of incentive due to reduced competition; second, a lack of interest among citizens; third, a lack of or failure to devote resources to local news coverage; and fourth, an immediacy of economic interest that discourages critical reporting.

Lack of competition

In 1910, the number of English-language daily newspapers in the United States peaked at 2,200. Of the 1,207 cities with dailies, more than half -- 689 cities -- had competing dailies. Since then competition has plummeted. In 1976, the United States had 1,756 dailies in 1,550 cities. Only 39 cities, or 2.5 percent, had competing dailies. (In another 142 cities, two dailies operated under joint ownership or with merged printing and business operations.) Competition exists almost exclusively in large cities. "The prevailing pattern was one daily for cities under 100,000 in population, and single ownership or joint printing of a morning-evening combination in cities from 100,000 to 500,000." (29)

This lack of competition dampens a newspaper's incentive to aggressively cover local politics. Does it also place newspapers in a position to monopolize the supply of information about local government? Dahl thinks not. "Even the newspapers themselves are not monolithic," he writes. Newspapers display not only the bias of owners and managers, but of individual reporters and editors as well. Some papers may depend heavily on press releases and official statements, allowing astute officials the opportunity to set the agenda. Dahl's research showed that the more politically active a person, the more likely they are to read an out-of-town newspaper. Radio, television, and personal conversation are also important alternatives. Finally, policy makers are likely to turn

to experts for information on many subjects. (30)

If Dahl's reasoning is correct, there are alternative sources of information, but not the type (with the exception of television news) likely to incite probing reporting.

Interest in local government

Studies have found that some newspapers pay little attention to local news, primarily because it is perceived as dull stuff that attracts few readers. (31) "The cost of really covering local government and civic affairs is high, and the return in readership, and ultimately in advertising, is usually low," observed Banfield and Wilson. "Coverage of local government is to a large extent a luxury that the paper indulges in from public-serving motives." (32) Papers run purely for profit, or those not prosperous enough to afford higher aims, are likely to give local affairs the short shrift. Cox and Morgan argee that the popular perception is "that local government is dull, and that reporting it is a matter of civic duty rather than natural inclination." (33)

Readership studies support this perception. A survey of 6,564 readers of 10 newspapers found they ranked news of the city council and local politicians 17th of 25 topics. News of state government fared worst, 18th of 25, but national politics was fifth on their list. (34) A study of television news revealed that viewers thought coverage of "issues" more important than fires, disasters, entertainment, weather, and sports, but among the "issues," news of

city council fared poorly compared to news of the economy and consumerism. (35)

Lack of resources

The quality of local coverage is related to the size of newspaper staffs, experience of reporters, and specialization of reporters. It takes "good reporters to report the news fairly and interpret it intelligently," Banfield and Wilson observed. (36) But good reporters are hard to keep. "Nothing is more certain than that if a junior shows promise he will be in line for transfer to a higher division within the profession . . . " said Cox and Morgan. (37)

Papers with small, overextended news staffs are forced "to accept the standard routine of writing up 'what was said' in council and committee, plus what could be culled from hand-outs and annual reports." Lacking the expertise to make authoritative criticism, reporters basically transmit raw information. (38)

Goldenberg found that resource poor groups have the greatest access when a newspaper has specialists and columnists covering more than the traditional beats of city hall, police station and so forth. Larger news staffs and larger news holes also help. (39)

Conflicting interests

"Newspapers tend to be conservative influences in the community because big business is conservative and newspaper

publishing, at least for the large-city dailies, is big business," writes Charles R. Adrian. A that is daily politically moderate on national and international questions "may become much more conservative, or even reactionary, on matters of local politics." (40) Newspapers have a stake in growth and prosperity. "As a metropolis expands, a larger number of ad lines can be sold on the basis of the increasing circulation base." (41) This leads to boosterism. "Harping at local faults, investigating dirty politics, revealing unsavory scandals, and stressing governmental inefficiencies only provide readily available documentary material to competing cities, which might find such information useful in campaigns to attract workers and industry," Peterson writes. (42)

Cox and Morgan found editors and reporters biased in favor of those things considered to be for "the good of the town." Officials and government itself are cast in a favorable light. Political controversy too sharp is avoided since it makes the community look bad to outsiders. " . . . The local press is on the side of quiet, orderly government." (43)

Related to economic interests is the proximity of the media to newsmakers in a local setting. "He may well be part of the same social networks as a high proportion of his key sources and of many of the people whose activities it is his job to scrutinize and report," Cox and Morgan said. Certain types of reporting hurt the reporter socially and his paper economically. (44)

Opportunities for influence

In addition to these limitations on media influence, the urban setting has characteristics conducive to a strong role for the media. Chief among these is the non-partisan nature of politics in many cities and the decentralization of authority. "The more decentralized is authority in a city, the greater is the opportunity for unofficial institutions, especially civic associations, labor and business organizations, and newspapers to exercise influence," said Banfield and Wilson. (45) Greenstone and Peterson make a similiar observation. (46)

Non-partisan elections remove political parties as key players, allowing other institutions even greater influence. Said one newspaperman of non-partisan elections, "You can't tell the players without a scorecard, and we sell the scorecards." (47) The growing importance of newspapers and television as campaigning tools has gone hand-and-hand with the decline of machine politics. (48)

Non-partisanship also increases the incentive for relatively unknown politicians to take positions on emotional issues that will attract media attention. In a party system, the value of such publicity is less. Rather, the candidate who stands out risks offending party officials who seek a consensus on such issues. (49)

And, as already noted, the absence of the party as an intermediate structure leaves officials more dependent on the media to convey information and rally support.

Banfield and Wilson also believed media influence was greatest among the middle class and in cities where they dominate. The media's "public-regarding" ideas find fertile ground among the middle class public. (50) And, as Leo Bogart observed:

> As one ascends the social scale, there is a greater sense of ease, intimacy, and personal relationship between the reader and his paper. It seems as though the better educated reader is more likely to view his hometown paper as an institution made up of people doing a job, subject to personal influences, and capable of rendering a service. For those lower on the educational scale, the newspaper as a major institution of power appears remote and impersonal. (51)

Media influence also increases as voters are asked to choose among many obscure candidates or vote on a multitude of referenda. (52) In such situations, the voter lacks independent sources of information or isn't motivated to seek those sources. Dahl suggests "the influence of the local newspapers is likely to be a good deal less on issues that attract the interest and concern of large numbers of voters than on issues over which they are unconcerned." (53)

A final factor is a city's size. In small, homogeneous cities and suburbs, newspapers concentrate on the consensus aspect of local affairs and avoids controversy. In larger, more heterogeneous cities, large dailies have the resources and security to scrutinize public affairs. Emphasizing controversial issues helps maintain communication between the multiple interest groups in an urban area, write C. N. Olien, G. A. Donohue, and P. J.

Tichenor. "Such emphasis on conflict is not necessarily disruptive, but it is part of the process of resolving conflicts and managing them at tolerable levels. In this sense, conflict reporting may be functional for maintaining the city as a whole." (54)

Summary

The theory of social complexity leads to the assumption that the media should have less influence in city government than in Washington or state capitals. City officials face a smaller, less complex political world and have more direct contact with constituents and colleagues. While less complexity makes officials less suspectible, other factors make the media less potent. With less competition and reader interest to motivate them, lacking resources and hampered by conflicting interests, publishers and broadcasters are less likely to expose corruption, harp on problems or express controversial opinions.

Social scientists studying urban politics disagree on the extent of media influence. Elitists often see the media as far removed from real power, while pluralists view it as one of many bidders in a competitive arena. Trends toward non-partisanship and greater influence for the middle class are generally thought to increase the sway of institutions such as the media. The observations lend some support to Dunn's model, confirming the media's ability to focus attention on people and issues and serve

as a channel to inform the public. Not as strong is the media's role in providing information to officials or commenting on performance.

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CHAPTER IV

THE SURVEY

A review of the literature on urban politics leaves unanswered the question of whether the media has the same impact on the local level that it has at the federal and state levels. While Dunn's resources (the media's ability to "set agendas," provide information to decision makers, provide decision makers with a means to inform the public, and comment on officials' performance) appear relevant to city policy making, the media has significant limitations at the local level. These are a reduced level of competition, a lack of reader interest in news of local government, a lack of financial resources, and an immediacy of economic interest. Perhaps most important, local government is less complex than state or federal government. City officials have less information to digest and more personal contact with citizens and others in government.

To test Dunn's model in an urban settting, a telephone survey of officials in Norfolk and Virginia Beach was conducted in May 1986 (see appendix 1). The survey contained a series of questions in which officials were asked to state whether the media, citizens, and other government officials were their most important source of information. A parallel set of questions were asked in two issue

areas -- budgeting and zoning. The budgeting process is generally non-controversial and most often has a diffuse effect on the population. As such, it attracts a low level of citizen participation. Budget hearings are sparsely attended, even when modest tax increases are proposed. Zoning issues, on the other hand, are frequently controversial and affect the aesthetic and financial interests of specific property owners and residents. In the more controversial cases, citizen participation is great. Residents knock on doors to enlist support, circulate petitions, meet with city officials, and pack public hearings.

Officials were also asked how often they read newspapers, watched television news, talked with citizens, and talked with others within government. They were asked how often they were interviewed by reporters, how often they were quoted by the media, and how often they contacted reporters to initiate coverage. A series of questions on demographics and political attitudes were included, also.

Fifty-six officeholders were identified as candidates for the poll: the seven members each of the Norfolk council and planning commission, the 11 members each of the Virginia Beach council and planning commission, and 10 top administrators from each city. Letters were sent to 51 of these; addresses and phone numbers for the remaining five were not available. Of those contacted, 31 agreed to participate, for a response rate of 60 percent. The remainder either refused to take part or could not be reached after

one initial call and two call-backs. The sample included 11 elected officials, 7 appointed officials, and 13 administrators. Twenty persons were from Virginia Beach; 11 from Norfolk. There were 25 men and 6 women; 29 whites, 1 Hispanic, and 1 black. (The sample included 46 men and 10 women; 50 whites and 6 non-whites.)

The respondents had served an average 8.4 years in their present office and 13.4 years in public office. Native Virginians made up 45.2 percent of the sample; natives of other Southern states, 9.7 percent; and natives of other states, 45.2 percent. The respondents had resided in their particular city for an average 26.5 years and in Virginia for 36.8 years. The average age was 51.4. Occupations included 14 government employees, 8 businessmen, 3 attorneys, 3 housewives, 2 doctors, and 1 farmer. All had continued their education beyond high school: 19.4 percent had less than a bachelor's degree, 41.9 percent a bachelor's degree, 25.8 percent a master's degree, and 13.0 percent a doctorate or law degree.

Most, 61.3 percent, considered themselves ideological moderates; 29 percent were conservatives; and 3.2 percent, liberals. Independents outnumered either Republicans or Democrats. The breakdown was strong Republicans, 9.7 percent; Republicans, 22.6 percent; independent but leaning Republican, 12.9 percent; independents, 25.8 percent; independent but leaning Democrat, 6.5 percent; Democrats, 9.7 percent; and strong Democrats, 6.5 percent. Twenty-one of the respondents voted for Reagan in 1984, while six

chose Mondale and two said they voted for other candidates.

CHAPTER V

THE SETTING

Virginia's largest cities -- Virginia Beach and Norfolk -- are located in the southeast corner of the state where the Chesapeake Bay joins the Atlantic Ocean. They are part of the Norfolk Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, the nation's 29th largest SMSA with a population of 1.2 million. (1) The area is known as "Hampton Roads."

Although neighbors, the cities have many differences. Norfolk was incorporated more than three centuries ago, while the present city of Virginia Beach is less than three decades old. Slightly more than 35 percent of Norfolk's residents are black, compared with only 10 percent of Virginia Beach's residents. Most Norfolk families rent their homes, while almost two-thirds of Virginia Beach families are home-owners. Norfolk's population has been up and down -- but mostly down -- during the past 25 years. Virginia Beach, the nation's third fastest growing city during the 1970s, continues to add 5 percent to its population annually. (2)

Virginia Beach's boundaries were drawn in 1963 by the merger of rural-suburban Princess Anne County (population 77,127 in 1960) and the small resort city for which the new municipality was named (population 8,091). It covers a sprawling 310 square miles that

includes farmland, shopping malls, numerous subdivisions, but no downtown area. Virginia Beach surpassed Norfolk in the early 1980s to become Virginia's most populous city. Its 1984 population is estimated at 309,100 persons. (3)

Norfolk has served as Virginia main seaport since Colonial times. World War II brought an influx of military personnel and spending to the city, doubling its population between 1940 and 1960. But much of Norfolk's gains were made at the expense of neighboring localities. Norfolk annexed 22 square miles of Princess Anne and Norfolk counties in the 1950s, setting the stage for decisions in the 1960s that would lock the city into its present 65.75 square miles. (4) Virginia law provides for strict separation of cities and counties -- "the county performs no functions within the corporate limits of the city and exercises no jurisdiction over city residents." (5) Thus, every piece of territory gained by the city is forever lost to the county. Rather than see themselves gobbled up piecemeal, the counties employed their only sure defense -- they themselves became cities. So were formed the present cities of Virginia Beach and neighboring Chesapeake. Norfolk's population, 304,869 in 1960, had slipped to 279,800 by 1984 (6).

Virginia Beach is one of the state's most affluent cities, while Norfolk is among its poorest. Of the nine Virginia cities with populations of 100,000 or more (7), Virginia Beach in 1980 had the smallest percentage of residents below the poverty level, 8.9

percent, while Norfolk had the third highest, 16.8 percent. Virginia Beach's medium family income was second of the nine at $21,809, while Norfolk's was the lowest at $14,779. Virginia Beach's unemployment rate was second lowest of the cities at 5.3 percent; Norfolk's was the highest at 7.7 percent.

But these numbers do not tell the entire story. The cities are alike in ways that set them apart from other municipalities in the state. Generally, they are more cosmopolitan and their population more diverse, although by national standards they, like all Virginia cities, are relatively homogenous. Only 39.1 percent of Virginia Beach's residents and 49.3 percent of Norfolk's are native born Virginians -- compared with 79.1 percent in Roanoke and 73.5 percent in Richmond. Virginia Beach's population is 4.2 percent foreign-born and Norfolk's 4 percent -- compared to 1.8 percent for Richmond and 1 percent for Roanoke. Virginia Beach's population is 2 percent of Spanish origin and 2.5 percent of Asian descent. Norfolk's is 2.3 percent Spanish and 2.7 percent Asian. Richmond and Roanoke's populations are made up of 1 percent or less of each minority. On each of these factors, Norfolk and Virginia Beach rank second and third among the nine cities, surpassed only by Alexandria in the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C.

The economy of both cities depends heavily on military spending. In 1984, the armed services accounted for 32.5 percent of the $4.4 billion in wages and salaries paid in Norfolk and 23.1 percent of Virginia Beach's $2.0 billion payroll. The average is

1.7 percent nationwide and 7.4 percent for the state. (8) Federal civilian employment accounts for many other jobs, as does the defense contracts held by scores of local computer and consulting firms. Major military installations in the area include the Naval Station and Naval Air Station in Norfolk and the Little Creek Amphibious Base, Ocean Air Station, Dam Neck Training Center, and Fort Story in Virginia Beach.

In fiscal year 1980, Norfolk spent $210.2 million, or $787.48 per capita, on public services. It spent $75.1 million on education, $32.4 million on police and fire protection, $20.4 million on public works, and $17.1 million on welfare. Its debts totaled $88.7 million.

In the same year, Virginia Beach spent $187.2 million on services, $714.20 per capita, including $75.7 million for schools, $17.4 million for police and fire protection, $5.2 million for welfare, and $17.9 million for public works. Rapid growth had left the city with $197.5 million in debts. (9)

A survey for 1983 valued Norfolk's taxable real estate at $786.7 million and its improvements at $2.8 billion. Virginia Beach had $2.9 billion in real estate and $4.8 billion in improvements. Taxable retail sales in Norfolk exceed $1.6 billion in 1983, the highest of any city in the state. Virginia Beach ranked third with $1.5 billion in taxable retail sales. (10)

Virginia Beach affluence has allowed it the lowest real estate tax rate among the state's largest cities -- 80 cents per $100

assessed value. Norfolk ranks fifth of nine with a rate of $1.25. The owner of a $60,000 home would pay $480 taxes in Virginia Beach, but $750 in Norfolk. Personal property taxes and sewer rates are higher in Virginia Beach. The tax on a $10,000 vehicle would be $300 in in Virginia Beach, compared to $272 in Norfolk. A household would pay almost $50 for 4,500 gallons of water and sewer service in Virginia Beach. The same would cost less than $20 in Norfolk. (11)

Like all Virginia cities, Norfolk and Virginia Beach have a city manager form of government. Norfolk has seven councilmembers elected at-large. Virginia Beach has 11 seats, split between at-large and ward districts.

Conditions favoring influence

Each city has a non-partisan council and city manager, a structure conducive to media influence. As noted earlier, parties provide cues to voters and serve as an intermediate structure between officials and the mass of citizens. Where parties are absent, officials are more likely to appeal directly to citizens through the media.

Officials in Virginia Beach, a middle class, affluent city, should be more open to media influence than Norfolk office holders. Middle class constituents, as compared to lower class citizens, are better educated, more attentive to the media, and more likely to respond to the "public-regarding" appeals of the media.

In population size and complexity, the two cities are comparable. Each government administers a similar size budget. Each has its challenges -- urban decay and redevelopment in Norfolk, a fantastic growth rate in Virginia Beach. Both are relatively homogeneous by national standards, though more cosmopolitan than most other areas of the state.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. All figures are from the 1980 Census unless otherwise indicated.

2. Mark Davis, "Population at Beach up by 21,000," Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, Va.), Jan. 14, 1986: D1.

3. Julia H. Martin and David W. Sheatsley, Estimate of the Population of Virginia Counties and Cities: 1983 and 1984 (Charlottesville, Va.: Tayloe Murphy Institute, University of Virginia 1985.)

4. David G. Temple, Merger Politics: Local Government Consolidation in Tidewater Virginia (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1972) 9.

5. Temple 14.

6. Martin and Sheatsley.

7. Others are Alexandria, Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Portsmouth, Richmond, and Roanoke.

8. "Where wealth and poverty grow hand in hand," Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, Va.), March 9, 1987, Business Weekly section: 14-15.

9. Virginia, Auditor of Public Accounts, Comparative Cost of County Government: Year Ended June 30, 1980 (Richmond: 1981.)

10. Virginia, Department of Taxation, Annual Report: 1983-84

(Richmond: 1984.)

11. Hampton, Va., Office of Budget and Analysis, "Comparison of Virginia's Ten Largest Cities: FY86 Major Revenue Sources" (Hampton: 1985.)

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS: LIMITED EFFECTS

Results of the survey provide sufficient evidence to support a hypothesis that media influence is less at the city level than the state and federal levels. The social complexity model applies: City officials say they gather and disperse information by talking directly with citizens and others within government. In a variety of situations, respondents chose as their most important source of information either 1) direct contact with citizens or 2) conversations with others within government. (These two sources were of near equal importance). Only in a handful of situations was the media the primary source for more than a small fraction of those surveyed.

Yet, the officials do see the media as powerful. Respondents were almost unanimous declaring the media to be the public's chief source of information about local government. They believed the media determined what issues stay on the public agenda and must be addressed by the city government. The officials' attempt to influence the content of news reports appeared primarily passive -- they counted on reporters to be on hand at meetings and made their pitch for this or that program in the public form. Less than half of those interviewed claimed to have ever contacted a reporter in

hopes of getting a story in the paper or on the air. And most of these were administrators and department heads.

Setting the agenda

City officials say overwhelmingly that new issues are brought to the public agenda by citizens and colleagues. They learn of needs through phone calls, meetings with civic leagues, staff reports, and so forth. The media, however, is able to spotlight problems and keep these in the forefront of the public's attention. One Virginia Beach administrator explained: "The paper continues to give an issue play and gives it high profile. Then an insignificant matter becomes a great concern for the city and the council."

Asked to rate their sources of information about community problems, most officials gave high marks to conversations with citizens, community leaders, and colleagues. A majority also saw internal reports as very important. But few placed great value in television, radio or newspapers reports. (Table 1) A sizeable minority rated the media "unimportant." A Norfolk council member's remark that "Sometimes they're objective and sometimes they're not" was one of the kinder characterization's of media messages. Several elected officials had harsher words: "Most of the time it's the reporter's opinion," said another Norfolk council member. "It's negative, and it's not the truth," said a Virginia Beach council member. "Biased and prejudiced," another from Virginia

TABLE 1

HOW OFFICIALS RATED SOURCES OF INFORMATION

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	
Conversations with citizens	67.7 n=21	29.0 n=9	3.2 n=1	100.0 n=31
Conversations with community leaders	71.0 n=22	19.4 n=6	9.7 n=3	100.0 n=31
Discussions with other officials	73.3 n=22	23.3 n=7	3.3 n=1	100.0 n=30
Reports prepared within government	53.3 n=16	43.3 n=13	3.3 n=1	100.0 n=30
Television and radio news	3.3 n=1	53.3 n=16	43.3 n=13	100.0 n=30
Newspaper reports and editorials	6.7 n=2	56.7 n=17	36.7 n=11	100.0 n=31

Beach said, "absolutely, totally inaccurate."

Almost no officials took their cue on the need for new programs or changes in zoning laws from the media. (Table 2) The impetus for new programs came equally from citizens and colleagues. One Norfolk council member said the city manager, his staff or department heads usually point out the need for new programs. "Civic leagues, if they have a problem in their neighborhoods" are also instrumental. Other officials cited public hearings and needs assessments conducted by departments. The need for changes in zoning laws is usually made known by others within government, primarily the planning department and commission. "We do a pretty good job internally," said Virginia Beach administrator.

But officials give themselves little credit for being able to dictate which issues remain in the spotlight. One department head admitted, "We certainly try to control the issues," but she believed ultimately officials couldn't dictate which issues stay in the forefront of the public's attention.

The question of who sets the agenda -- the people or the media -- is akin to the old riddle of which came first -- the chicken or the egg. Table 3 shows how officials view the situation. They were fairly evenly divided over who controls the spotlight, half voting for the media, slightly fewer picking citizens. A majority equated media attention with public concern, while less than half believed the issues highlighted by the media were those important for the city.

TABLE 2

FOCUSING ATTENTION

	Citizens	Officials	Media	Other	
Point out need for new programs	43.3 n=13	40.0 n=12	3.3 n=1	13.4 n=4	100.0 n=30
Point out need for changes in zoning laws	26.7 n=8	56.7 n=17	0.0 n=0	16.6 n=5	100.0 n=30
Keeps issues in the spotlight	38.7 n=12	0.0 n=0	48.4 n=15	12.9 n=4	100.0 n=31

TABLE 3

AGENDA SETTING

	Yes	No	Other*	
Media keeps issues in the spotlight	48.4 n=15	38.7 n=12	12.9 n=4	100.0 n=31
Media emphasizes issues important to citizens	71.0 n=22	29.0 n=9	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=31
Media emphasizes issues important to city	41.9 n=13	58.1 n=18	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=31

* 12.9 percent said the media and citizens are equally responsible for keeping issues in the spotlight.

One Virginia Beach council member said the issues usually start with a concern among citizens, which is picked up by the media. "If a citizen wants to win a point, they call the press." Said a Norfolk council member, "The papers may whip things up a bit." A colleague felt, "If anybody kept it (an issue) alive, it would be the media. The media is very influential. The media keeps controversy going." "The newspapers can create an issue. They can make a media event out of something," said a Norfolk department head.

A Virginia Beach department head viewed the dilemna of "who's first" this way: "I don't think the news media covers them (issues) because the citizens are concerned about them. I think the citizens are concerned because the news media covers them. The news media covers what they think the citizens are concerned about."

Another department head from that city noted that the media focused on broad issues that were of concern to most residents, but also gave substantial coverage in peripheral matters than affected only a small segment.

A majority of officials (58 percent) believed the media did not concentrate on the issues most important for the city. "They miss the biggest stories because they're boring or dull," said a Virginia Beach planning commissioner. Said a Norfolk council member, "The news they report is what's going to grab the people. If it's colorful, they're going to make more of it. If it's not

interesting to the public, they'll go on to something else." "They dwell on the sensational with the ultimate purpose of selling more newspapers," said a Virginia Beach council member.

A Norfolk administrator who said the media did focus on the issues important for the city explained it this way: "If they (newspapers) weren't, people wouldn't read them and be interested in them." A colleague who also equated media attention with importance had a different rationale: "They can make them important, then you have to deal with those issues."

Source of information

The survey asked officials to state their most important source for three types of information: 1) public opinion, 2) internal information about what is happening inside the city government, and 3) external information on actions by state and federal governments that affect the city. With one exception, it is only in the third area, where officials often lack interpersonal contact, that the media play an important role. (Tables 4a and 4b)

The exception was a question that asked which source officials thought to be most important in assessing public reaction to the budget. The media scored almost as high as the expected choice, conversations with citizens. On a similar question, which asked how they guage public reaction to zoning decisions, officials chose citizen input over the media 5-to-1. Comments by respondents offer an explanation for this seeming contradiction. On generally

TABLE 4a

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

	Citizens	Officials	Media	Other	
Inside government					
Budget before presented	0.0 n=0	82.8 n=24	3.4 n=1	13.8 n=4	100.0 n=29
Zoning proposals	14.8 n=4	63.0 n=17	11.1 n=3	11.1 n=3	100.0 n=27
Zoning decisions	0.0 n=0	81.8 n=18	13.6 n=3	4.5 n=1	100.0 n=22
Public opinion					
Support for tax hike	71.0 n=22	3.2 n=1	9.7 n=3	16.1 n=5	100.0 n=31
Reaction to budget	40.0 n=12	13.3 n=4	33.3 n=10	13.4 n=4	100.0 n=30
Support for rezoning	66.7 n=20	16.7 n=5	13.3 n=4	3.3 n=1	100.0 n=30

TABLE 4b

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

	Elected officials	Bureau-crats	Media	Other	
State government	35.5 n=11	16.1 n=5	32.3 n=10	16.1 n=5	100.0 n=31
Federal government	22.6 n=7	12.9 n=4	35.5 n=11	29.0 n=9	100.0 n=31

non-controversial financial matters, officials rely on news stories and letters to the editor because they hear little from constituents. "There aren't that many citizens that really react to the budget unless it includes a tax increase or decrease," one Virginia Beach department head said. Zoning matters are more explosive. "We know immediately through the amount of screaming or lack of screaming," said a Virginia Beach administrator. "The citizens will let us know in a heartbeat," said a council member from that city.

Asked about a controversial budget matter, i.e., a tax increase, officials chose citizen input overwhelmingly. (Civic leagues were mentioned by several persons as a key informer. "They let us know their thinking on financial areas and how it affects them," a Norfolk council member said.) Several did mention the media as an important secondary source of information in this area. "The media can be a facilitator. People write in opinions to the paper," said a Virginia Beach administrator. "It kind of summarizes what everybody is saying," a Virginia Beach department head said. Another Virginia Beach department head noted that, in the long-term, citizens expressed their satisfaction or anger over taxes at the polls. In the short-term, officials have to rely on a few phone calls and letters to the editor, he said.

In Chapter II, it was noted that officials in the federal government depended on the media not only for information about the outside world, but for the lowdown on internal situations as well.

In city government, officials said they can rely on internal channels. In Washington, the budget is the subject of news stories even before its publicly unveiled, but in city government, "the media won't have that information" that early, as a Virginia Beach administrator noted. Elected officials get briefings from the city manager and other staff. As for department heads, "One agency doesn't know what the other agency is asking for," a Virginia Beach official said. If they do get that information, it's through conversations with peers. In zoning cases, most officials find out what is being proposed and what is decided through official sources -- transcripts, briefings, and conversations with colleagues in the planning department.

The media plays a more important role in providing city officials with information about higher levels of government, but even here, other avenues are available. The cities have liasons in Richmond and Washington. The Virginia Muncipal League, National League of Cities, International City Managers Association, and others groups publish newletters and serve as pipelines for information. Some officials subscribe to the Federal Register and specialty magazines. "The media is not always able to explain things in such a way that they have relevance for local government," complained one administrator. Noted a Virginia Beach council member, "The first tipoff the majority gets is what they see written in the press or on television. We're normally advised by either the delegate or the Congressman."

Like the federal and state officials interviewed by Dunn, Matthews, and others, the city officials read newspapers avidly. All 31 claimed to have read a local newspaper every day of the seven prior to the interview. The city officals also frequently watched local television news. The sample averaged five nights of local news weekly. (A common reason for missing the news was that officials did not arrive home in time for the 6 p.m. broadcasts.) Administrators were more likely to tune in than other officials. Almost 70 percent of them saw the news all seven nights, compared with 45.5 percent of elected officials and 42.9 percent of appointed officials.

The officials talked with citizens about city government an average of five days weekly. Among elected officials, 45.5 percent claimed to have talked with citizens all seven days. This is despite the fact that only 18.2 percent of them set office hours to meet with citizens. Appointed officials talked with citizens almost as frequently as their elected counterparts; there was daily contact for 42.9 percent. Administrators clearly had the least contact with citizens. Thirty percent had talked with citizens three days or fewer in the week.

Elected officials talked with others in local government about city matters almost as frequently as they talked with citizens, having such contact an average of slightly more than five days weekly. Assuming that administrators must discuss city matters with other administrators daily as part of their job, these

respondents were asked specifically if they had spoken with an elected official in the past week. They averaged such contact only 2.4 days weekly; 38.5 percent had no such conversations. Appointed officials talked with elected officials slightly more frequently, averaging three days a week.

Informing the public

Some call it unfortunate, but almost all respondents agreed that the public depends on the media for information about how tax dollars are spent and zoning matters decided. (Table 5) Yet, more than half say they have never called a reporter to attempt to get an important story covered. Only about a third contact reporters as frequently as three or four times a year, and many of those are administrators. Whether officials contact reporters is very much a function of their role in city government. The mean level of contact (measured on a scale on which 0 is "no contact" and 4 is "at least weekly") is 0.29 for appointed officials, 0.55 for elected officials, and 1.75 for administrators. The difference is significant at the 0.0073 level.

Conversations with officials reveal several reasons for their timidity in dealing with the media. The first, and most important, is that in most situations they don't have to initiate contact. "They are in attendance. You get coverage from the press without asking for it," noted a Norfolk council member. "I don't have to call them and say, guys, I've got something important," said a

TABLE 5

PUBLIC'S SOURCE OF INFORMATION

	Word-of-mouth	Attending meetings	Media	Other	
About how the city spends tax dollars	0.0 n=0	6.5 n=2	90.3 n=28	3.2 n=1	100.0 n=31
About decisions in zoning cases	9.7 n=3	6.5 n=2	83.9 n=26	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=31

Norfolk department head. "The reporters are going to be present when the controversy is taking place." Said a Virginia Beach department head: "It's a function of the media, covering public hearings. We know they will be there."

Almost all officials said council members take advantage of the media's presence at meetings to disperse their views to a wider public. "Anything we have to say, we say at our meetings and the press picks it up," said a Norfolk council member. "I have a controversy to bring up tonight," said a Virginia Beach council member. "They'll be there, and they'll report it." More than a third of all officials (and almost two-thirds of elected officials) said that at least weekly the media quoted comments they made at meetings or other public events.

Contact outside meetings are also initiated by reporters. When a controversy is aflame, "Usually they'll contact me or contact some other council person," said a Norfolk council member. Elected officials are contacted most frequently; 72.7 percent said they are interviewed at least weekly. Among administrators, 61.5 percent are interviewed at least weekly. Appointed officials are interviewed less frequently; the majority, 57.1 percent, say it happens three or four times a year.

A second reason for officials' hesitancy to contact reporters is that, for some, such a tactic is taboo. "It's unethical and immoral," said a Virginia Beach council member. "We call it 'tougue in the ear of the reporter.'" "It's against my

principles," said a Norfolk department head. One Norfolk council member said the proper way to approach the media was through a small group representing the council, usually the mayor, city manager, and maybe another council member. They would talk to the publisher, the head of the news department, and editor of the editorial page.

For members of the bureaucracy, contact with the media often must be sanctioned by the city manager's office. As one Virginia Beach department head said, he contacts reporters "only after given the green light."

Finally, officials refrain from contacting reporters because they do not trust nor like members of the media. For example, one Virginia Beach council member would send letters to the editor, but avoided interviews "for fear they would take what I said out of context." More than half of elected officials said the media had been unfair in its treatment of them. Of those officials, almost all said they never contacted reporters. For all officials, the mean level of contact (on a scale of 0 to 4) is 0.15 for those who felt themselves wronged. For those who felt the media had been fair, the mean was 1.3. The difference is significant at the 0.05 level. (Hostility to the media was greatest among elected officials. All appointed officials and all but one administrator rated the media "fair.")

The relationship between attitudes toward the media and the officials' willingness to contact reporters is tempered by the

officials' role. To test this, a scale was constructed based on officials' answers to three questions: had the media been fair in its treatment of them, does the media emphasize issues important to citizens, and does the media emphasize issues important to the city. Possible scores ranged from 0 (for those who rated the media poor in each area) to a 3 (for those who gave the media a favorable mark on each).

Crosstabulations revealed that among elected officials, a contact increased with a favorable view of the media. (Table 6) A symmetric relationship between the variables is ventured. Officials that have a favorable opinion of the media contact reporters more often. Contact, in return, enhances that favorable opinion. It could also be argued that contact and good relations with reporters produces the type of coverage that the officials approve of.

Linsky found that the federal officials who were most successful in initiating stories were those that devoted the most time to the media, were on the friendliest terms with reporters, and believed the media to have the more substantial impact on policy. Officials that did the best at setting the agenda were "realists," he said, who realized that "the press has a big impact on policy making, spending time and working with the press helps with coverage, and much of what becomes news is transmitted to the press by the policy makers themselves." (1)

City administrators contact reporters because it is their job.

TABLE 6

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE MEDIA, CONTACT, AND ROLE

Elected officials

	View of the media		
	0-1	2	3
How often contact reporters			
Never	100.0 n=4	50.0 n=3	0.0 n=0
Annually	0.0 n=0	50.0 n=3	0.0 n=0
Monthly	0.0 n=0	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=1
Total	100.0 n=4	100.0 n=6	100.0 n=1

(Somer's D = 0.677 symmetric)

TABLE 6 (continued)

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE MEDIA, CONTACT, AND ROLE

Administrators

How often contact reporters	View of the media 0-1	2	3
Never	40.0 n=2	25.0 n=1	25.0 n=1
Semi-annually	0.0 n=0	25.0 n=1	75.0 n=3
Monthly	40.0 n=2	50.0 n=2	0.0 n=0
Weekly	20.0 n=1	0.0 n=0	0.0 n=0
Total	100.0 n=5	100.0 n=4	100.0 n=4

(Somer's D = -0.241)

Contact increases as one moves from department staff to department head to the city manager's office. A poor opinion of the media could be either a side effect of that contact or a product of the higher office.

(Contact was tested against a series of demographic variables as well. None produced proved significant beyond the 0.05 level. There was some indication that contact was less among business persons, men and Reagan supporters, while greater among non-business professionals, women, and non-Reagan supporters.)

Table 7 shows five situations in which officials worked to influence public opinion and whether in these situations the officials would contact citizens, either by calling or meeting with groups, and whether officials would contact the media in hopes of getting coverage. Officials were most active when trying to explain their actions in a controversial matter and when drumming up support for increasing spending for a city program. In each situation, most officials went straight to the people. Some worked through both direct contact and seeking media coverage. A few relied solely on the media.

Several reasons for communicating through the media were noted. A Virginia Beach planning commissioner said that reporters are sometimes called when complex changes in ordinances are proposed. "The newspapers are very helpful in explaining it to the public," he said. Another Virginia Beach administrator noted that the media is "a great facilitator in reaching the many publics."

TABLE 7

INFLUENCING PUBLIC OPINION

	Citizens only	Media only	Both	Neither	
To drum up support for increased spending for a city program	29.2 n=9	4.2 n=1	29.2 n=9	37.4 n=12	100.0 n=31
To drum up support for a tax cut	10.5 n=3	0.0 n=0	0.0 n=0	89.5 n=28	100.0 n=31
To explain actions in a controversial matter	45.8 n=14	8.3 n=3	25.0 n=8	20.9 n=6	100.0 n=31
To drum up support for a change in a zoning law	16.7 n=5	10.0 n=3	10.0 n=3	63.3 n=20	100.0 n=31
To explain actions in a controversial zoning matter	33.3 n=10	6.7 n=2	10.0 n=3	50.0 n=16	100.0 n=31

Yet, he said, any contact with reporters had to be made "very carefully."

Commenting on performance

Most officials believed city government was able to police itself. More than half said others within government were most likely to tell them of shortcomings of city programs and wasteful spending. Most others gave credit to citizens. (Table 8)

"If something is not going well, you learn about it pretty quickly" from others within government, said a Norfolk councilman. A Virginia Beach planning commissioner said employees -- such as bus drivers and mechanics -- are the best source of information. "We do a lot of self-policing," said a Virginia Beach department head. "A lot of internal auditing and checking." However, that person noted, exposes that appear in the national media do prompt city officials to get their own houses in order.

The media's role may depend on the magnitude of the problem. If the issue is less than spectacular, council members are likely to hear only from citizens, said a Virginia Beach office holder. "If it's a major issue, the media usually makes a big thing of it and people learn a lot about it." Officials may hear of problems first from citizens, "then it all get reported in the media." The media's aggressiveness is also a factor. "The media in the Northeast is much more alert and guarded," said an administrator who worked in that region. "I don't see that happening here."

TABLE 8

COMMENTING ON PERFORMANCE

	Citizens	Officials	Media	Other	
Most likely to bring to your attention shortcomings of programs	35.5 n=11	51.6 n=16	9.7 n=3	3.2 n=1	100.0 n=31
Most likely to point out wasteful spending	26.7 n=8	53.3 n=16	10.0 n=3	10.0 n=3	100.0 n=30
Most helpful in assessing whether program worth money spent on it	29.0 n=9	54.8 n=17	0.0 n=0	16.2 n=5	100.0 n=31
Most helpful in assessing effects of zoning decisions	33.3 n=10	43.3 n=13	6.7 n=2	16.7 n=5	100.0 n=30
Most likely to spot questionable development practices	32.3 n=10	35.5 n=11	32.3 n=10	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=31

Respondents were fairly evenly divided on whether citizens, the media or other officials were most likely to bring to their attention questionable practices among developers. "Citizens are the first to find out usually," said a Virginia Beach planning commissioner. A department head from that city agreed: "They are our best inspectors." A Norfolk council member said hears complaints from competing competitors and allegations by the investigative arm of city government. "I have had citizens call," said a Virginia Beach council member, "but usually that turns out to be a developer within his rights." Said a Norfolk council member: "We all read the media, and sometimes we come across something we don't know about. And we correct it."

Officials said the media played little role in helping them assess the worth of city programs or the effects of zoning decisions. A Virginia Beach council member said of news reports, "I tend to discount those so much they don't affect me too much." Another from that city labeled media reports "jaundiced." Those who said others in government were most useful in analysis referred to such things as workshops and staff reports. Others put the greatest value in public input, talking to the people most directly affected and civic league officials. One Virginia Beach department head noted that citizens were the most important source of information on matters that directly affect them, such as the rezoning of a particular piece of property. When a change in the language of the zoning law or other specialized matter is on the

agenda, the advice of others officials is most valuable.

Summary

Virginia Beach and Norfolk officials give the media great credit for setting the public agenda and informing citizens about government, but admit little dependency on the media for information and little effect from media comment on performance. The media's greatest resource appears to be its ability to keep issues in the spotlight where they demand attention from policymakers.

Most officials sought to influence media content passively through statements in public settings or by depending on reporters to call them. Less than half had contacted reporters to have an issue covered. Those who did initiate contact were most often administrators who see public relations as part of their job.

For the most part, the officials claimed to be able to learn of public opinion and matters within government without the media. One instance where the media played a role was in conveying a sense of public opinion on a non-controversial matter. The media also communicate information about actions by state and federal governments that may affect local policy making, though officials have other sources for this data as well. Officials claimed little need for media comment on performance of officials or assessments of policies.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

1. Linsky 93-94.

CHAPTER VII

NEWS COVERAGE OF POLICY MAKING

Norton Long wrote of the media as a powerful force in city government. "It has a great part in determining what most people are talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with." (1) While interviews with officials in Norfolk and Virginia Beach do not dispel the notion that the media has an important role, it would appear that Long and others may have granted too much influence to the media. The survey indicates that the media is able to focus attention on issues and serves as a channel for officials to communicate with the public. Yet, policy makers generally do not rely on the media for information or a feel for public opinion. Nor do they place much value on media comment on their performance.

Coverage of the budget and development

The primary newspaper in Norfolk and Virginia Beach is The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star. The paper publishes separate morning and afternoon editions, but the content changes very little from one to another. Its sells more than 220,000 newspapers daily.

For the purpose of this study, I examined issues of the paper from January through May 1986. Identified were stories, letters to the editor, and editorials in the two issue areas examined in the survey: 1) city budgets and spending and 2) zoning and development. Studied were the main sections of the paper, known as the "broadsheet," and the "tabloid" zoned editions. The Norfolk papers publish tabloids for both Norfolk and Virginia Beach. These are the Norfolk Compass, appearing twice weekly, and the Virginia Beach Beacon, three times weekly.

News content was studied to determine how frequently stories, letters, and editorials on each subject appeared and what type of issues were addressed by these stories, letters, and editorials.

Virginia Beach spending

A story related to city spending in Virginia Beach appeared in the broadsheet section roughly one day out of four. (Thirty-seven were counted during the five-month period.) Only a handful of these referred to the actual budget-making process. With no tax increase proposed, the budget warranted little news space. Most common were stories about individual projects on which the city was spending money. For example, the city council was criticized at a meeting for spending $12 million to replinish beach sand. A council plan to sell bonds to finance highway construction attracted considerable attention and resulted in several stories. Other stories dealt with smaller projects -- $1.5 million for

mapping, another $1.5 million for drainage, and $2.6 million for dredging projects.

The tabloid Beacon carried about three dozen stories about spending in the 52 editions during the period. Several stories on the school budget, along with graphs and the text of the superintendent's budget message, appeared in one issue. In another was a similar package on the city budget, with text of the city manager's letter to the council explaining the document.

The papers published three editorials or opinion columns concerning Virginia Beach city finances during the period. One on the editorial page addressed the road bond issue. Two in the tabloid speculated on whether the city should raise taxes. The latter two editorials prompted letters from seven readers, accounting for half the 14 letters about city spending appearing in the four months. Three other letter writers commented on whether city revenue should support a Norfolk-to-Virginia Beach train. The rest addressed issues such as impact fees and debt limits. Eleven letters on city spending appeared on the editorial page. Several addressed whether the city should support with its tax dollars a school-based pregnancy prevention clinic. Other concerns ranged from the superintendent's pay and higher real estate assessments to the need for better care for the elderly.

Virginia Beach development

Stories about zoning and development in the city appeared in

the broadsheet on about one day out of every three. (There were a total of 47.) Stories concerned policy decisions with wide-ranging effects (such as whether to abolish a "green line" separating urban and rural districts) and those on individual cases. (Usually, these were controversial in nature, such as a proposal for a beachfront amusement park.) Growth as an issue in city elections received considerable attention, as did a plan to charge a fee to builders to pay for a pipeline to bring water to the city. Several stories examined the governmental process: One story noted that the council is more sympathetic to developers than is the planning commission; another found citizens who pack public hearings frequently get their way on zoning matters.

The tabloid ran about 30 stories on development and zoning during the period. Most were about individual zoning cases before the city, though a few "issue" stories also appeared. The tabloid also regularly published agendas listing the cases to be heard at upcoming planning commission and city council meetings.

A single editorial on a development issue appeared. This concerned development as an issue in the city council campaign. There were 11 letters in the broadsheet and 14 in the tabloid. Most stated support or opposition to controversial projects. A few criticized officials for action that favored certain developers, while several wrote of development as an issue in the campaign.

Norfolk spending

Only 15 stories about city spending in Norfolk appeared in the broadsheet during the 121-day period. There were only five stories in the tabloid. Several stories in the broadsheet concerned a relatively minor expenditure to care for chimpanzees from the city zoo. Several focused on the cost of a controversial plan to end busing and return to neighborhood schools. Others were about the adoption of the school budget, a reduction in the boat tax, and a surplus in the general fund budget. Tabloid stories focused on city finances as an election issue and the cost of several programs.

There were no editorials on city spending. Of 16 letters about spending on the editorial page, five concerned money for the chimps and four money for a school-based clinic. Other writers felt taxes were too high. Several expressed the need for services such as a shelter for the homeless. All six letters in the tabloid concerned the chimps.

Norfolk development

Thirty stories about zoning and development in Norfolk appeared in the broadsheet and 11 in the tabloid. Most concerned downtown revitalization and projects such as the Costeau Center and Waterside. Some actions of the redevelopment and housing authority were reported. Several stories described issues likely to arise at upcoming Planning Commission meetings. The tabloid also published

agendas of upcoming city council and planning commission meetings.

Two editorials on development in the city appeared. One concerned the general direction of economic development; the second, a plan to abandon an experiment in downtown revitalization and reopen the Grandby Street Mall to traffic. Seven of the eight letters on development appearing on the editorial page concerned the multi-million dollar Costeau Center proposal for downtown. No letters on development ran in the tabloid.

Other stories

The paper published several stories and editorials addressing spending and zoning issues in the region as a whole. It reported on such things as the impact of state legislation on school budgets, the threat of reduced federal impact aid, the condominium building boom, and the financial contributions from developers to council candidates. Editorials addressed the financial wisdom of building a Norfolk-to-Virginia Beach railway and the anti-growth mood in the election.

The pattern of coverage

The trends apparent in the news content are: 1) policy making in Virginia Beach received much more attention than policy making in Norfolk; 2) stories that reveal information not routinely available to officials were few; and 3) editorial opinion on policy making was scarce and reader opinion concentrated on a few

controversial issues.

Coverage of Virginia Beach and Norfolk differed both in the number of stories and the variety of stories. In terms of number of stories, Virginia Beach was covered more intensely. In terms of content, while stories from both cities concentrated on a few controversial issues, a much greater variety of topics was covered in Virginia Beach. One explanation may be the nature of policy making in the two cities. During the period, decision making in Norfolk appeared largely consensual, as opposed to the confrontational manner of Virginia Beach politics. Disagreement over policy makes news; harmony does not.

On most survey questions, officials from Norfolk and Virginia Beach varied little in their answers. However, there was one notable exception -- 60 percent of Virginia Beach officials said the media, not citizens or officials, kept issues in the forefront of the public's attention, compared with just 27.3 percent of Norfolk officials. Also, fewer Virginia Beach officials believed the media emphasized issues important to the public or the city. (Table 9)

The attitude among Virginia Beach officials that the media dictates what issues occupy the spotlight, often despite a lack of public interest or importance to the city, may result from the more intensive coverage of issues in that city. On the other hand, Norfolk officials' belief that the issues they devote their time to are the issues citizens are concerned about, and not just the

TABLE 9

AGENDA SETTING: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CITIES

Virginia Beach

	Yes	No	Other*	
Media keeps issues in the spotlight	60.0 n=12	30.0 n=6	10.0 n=2	100.0 n=20
Media emphasizes issues important to citizens	65.0 n=13	35.0 n=7	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=20
Media emphasizes issues important to city	35.0 n=7	65.0 n=13	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=20

Norfolk

	Yes	No	Other	
Media keeps issues in the spotlight	27.3 n=3	54.5 n=6	18.2 n=2	100.0 n=11
Media emphasizes issues important to citizens	81.8 n=9	18.2 n=2	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=11
Media emphasizes issues important to city	54.5 n=6	45.5 n=5	0.0 n=0	100.0 n=11

* Said the media and citizens are equally responsible for keeping issues in the spotlight.

issues hyped by the media, reflects a city government very much in control of its agenda.

A greater media influence in Virginia Beach is consistent with the view that media influence is greater in cities dominanted by the middle class. This is due to the middle class's greater attention to newspaper and television reports.

A review of news stories also shows a lack of stories that reveal information not routinely available to public officials. In fact, a majority of articles concern public meetings. As mentioned earlier, few officials said they relied on the media for information about the inner workings of government. In contrast to the national media, which is often chasing rumors that this or that official may resign or disseminating the recommendations of draft reports, the local media seldom delves behind the scenes. This is due both to the limitations cited earlier, primarily lack of incentive and lack of resources, and because a smaller, less complex city government is a tougher nut to crack than the massive federal government.

The Norfolk newspaper is certainly as aggressive in its reporting as any in Virginia, having recently won the Pulitzer Prize for investigating the misconduct of a Chesapeake city official. Yet, in the period and issue areas examined, little evidence was found that the newspaper was uncovering misconduct or bringing citizen concerns to light.

Also scarce were editorials or columns on city policy making.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that officials did not turn to the media for comment on public policy. A number of letters to the editor did appear, but most referred to a few controversial issues. Many concerned issues, such as care for two chimpanzees, that had little real importance for the city.

Summary

Media influence at the local government level appears less than at the state and federal levels. Of the four resources identified by Dunn, the media in the city arena fares poorly on two: its ability to provide information to policy makers and its comment on their performance. An examination of newspaper content reveals that stories that would inform officials, stories that go beyond what is already well-known within government, are few. The editorial pages contained little comment on the workings of local government; relevations of poor performance were scarce.

A host of reasons have been put forth to explain why the media covering urban governments fail to be as aggressive as those in Washington and the various state capitals. They may lack the motivation of competition, fail to devote the resources, serve a public only moderately interested in local politics, or have conflicting economic interests. And, local government is smaller and less complex; the city department head and city council member can rely on interpersonal sources of information to a much greater extent than state or federal policy makers.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VII

1. Long 392.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Almost three decades ago, Joseph Klapper ventured the media's power may lie not in its ability to influence public opinion, which he doubted, but through its direct effect on elites. As shown in the study of a network documentary by Faye Lomax Cook, et. al., officials anticipate that the masses will read and listen to news reports and officials act accordingly. This study has examined the influence of the media on policy makers in city government. It is based on a model developed by Delmer D. Dunn from studies of state and federal government. Dunn said the media has four influential resources: its ability to focus attention and shape agendas, its ability to provide information to officials, its ability to serve as a channel for informing the public, and its commentary on the performance of officials.

Based on my research, teamed with a review of writings on urban politics, I offer several conclusions about the applicability of Dunn's model to local government:

* The chief resource of the media at the local level is its ability to spotlight certain policy issues. Officials are compelled to address these issues since media attention leads to citizen concern, or is perceived by politicians to cause citizen

concern. However, the more cohesive the leadership of a city government, the greater its ability to control the agenda. It where there is a lack of consensus on key issues that the media's influence is greatest.

* The media gains little influence as a provider of information for city officials since it primarily covers routine politics. City government is not so complex that officials need the media to keep track of developments within government, nor is the media able to supply this information. Direct contact with citizens is frequent enough that media information about citizens' needs becomes less important.

* City officials attempt to use the media to communicate their views, but seldom seek publicity directly. Rather, they depend on the media to report their comments from public meetings and seek their opinions on important issues. As with the foreign policy specialists observed by Cohen, city officials fail to take the initiative and allow reporters to decide what is and is not news.

* Compared with the abundance of opinion on national policy issues found in the media, comment on city government appears all but insignificant. Editorials that do appear tend more toward boosterism that controversy. Critical exposes of wasteful spending and other improprities are also infrequent because city media are short on highly-skilled reporters and reluctant to harp on local faults. Rather than exposing problems in the city to officials, the media report officials' views on what the city's problems are.

* Unlike many state legislators and Congressmen, local elected officials are not career politicians, but primarily business persons and professionals who distrust and avoid the media. Some argue that using the media to gain an advantage is unethical. Thus, while federal and state legislators frequently interact with reporters (and have a more cordial relationship with them than executives), many city council members keep their distance, leaving it to administrators to deal with the media.

* Overall, the media are influential in city policy making. It is the public's primary source of political information, which assures an impact upon policy makers, and is able to affect the public agenda. However, because city government is less complex, the media influence is less than at the state and federal levels.

APPENDIX 1

1. How important are the following sources of information in apprising you of important community problems, very important, somewhat important or not important:

a) telephone calls and other conversations with citizens?

b) conversations with businessmen, representatives of various organizations and other community leaders?

c) discussions with other public officials?

d) reports prepared by others in city goverment?

e) news reports and editorials on television and radio?

f) news reports, editorials and letters to the editor in local newspapers?

2. I would like to ask a series of questions about some specific decisions that affect how the city's money is spent. Which source has generally been most useful in bringing to your attention the need for new public programs?

a) talking with citizens and community leaders

b) talking with others in city goverment

c) reports and editorials in the media

3. How do you think most of the public learns how the city spends tax dollars?

a) by talking with city officials and attending meetings

b) through news reports

c) through word-of-mouth

4. As a city budget is being developed, before any proposal is presented to the City Council, what is generally the best source of information about what various departments are asking for?

a) talking with others within city government

b) the media

c) talking with citizens

5. Which source is most likely to bring to your attention the shortcomings of city programs, should they occur?

a) citizens

b) information supplied by other city officials

c) media reports

6. Which is most helpful in assessing whether a city service is really worth the money spent on it?

a) talking with citizens
b) information supplied by other city officials
c) media reports

7. Which source is usually most valuable in assessing whether city residents would support an increase in the tax rate?
a) citizens
b) talking with others in city government
c) the media

8. Have you ever actively tried to drum up support for increased spending for a city program?
a) yes
b) no

(IF YES)
8a. Have you ever done so by calling or meeting with citizens?
a) yes
b) no
8b. Have you ever done so by contacting the press to ensure important
issues are covered?
a) yes
b) no

(IF YES TO BOTH 8a and 8b)
8c. Which would you say you have done more often?
a) citizens
b) media

9. Have you ever tried to drum up support for a tax cut?
a) yes
b) no

(IF YES)
9a. Have you ever done so by calling or meeting with citizens?
a) yes
b) no
9b. Have you ever done so by contacting reporters?
a) yes
b) no

(IF YES TO BOTH 9a and 9b)
9c. Which would you say you have done more often?
a) citizens
b) media

10. Have you ever felt it necessary to explain to the public your actions in a controversial matter?
a) yes

b) no

(IF YES)
10a. Have you ever done so by calling and meeting with citizens?
a) yes
b) no
10b. Have you ever done so by contacting the press to ensure important issues are covered?
a) yes
b) no

(IF YES TO BOTH 10a and 10b)
10c. Which would you say you have done more often?
a) citizens
b) media

11. Which is generally most useful in assessing the public's reaction to the city budget once it has been adopted?
a) talking with citizens
b) reports in the media
c) talking with other city officials

12. Which source is most useful in pointing out wasteful spending should it exist in city departments?
a) talking with citizens
b) the media
c) others within city government

13. Which is the best source of information about actions by state government that might affect the city's budget?
a) local representatives in the state legislature
b) state officials
c) the media

14. Which is the best source of information about actions by the federal government that might affect the city's budget?
a) local representatives in the Congress
b) federal officials
c) the media

15. Now, I would like to ask a series of questions about some specific decisions that affect commercial and residential building in the city.
How do you think most of the public learns about zoning decisions made by the city?
a) by talking with city officials and attending meetings
b) through news reports
c) through word-of-mouth

16. As various zoning cases are reviewed, before they reach a public hearing, what is usually the best source of information about what is being proposed?
    a) talking with other city officials
    b) media reports
    c) talking with citizens

17. How do you most often learn of decisions made by the Planning Commission on zoning issues:
    a) talking with citizens
    b) media reports
    c) official sources

18. Which source is most likely to point out the need for changes in city zoning laws?
    a) citizens
    b) the media
    c) others within city government

19. Which do you find most useful in analysing and helping you understand the effects of various zoning decisions?
    a) talking with citizens
    b) media reports
    c) talking with others in city government

20. Have you ever actively tried to drum up support for a change in zoning laws?
    a) yes
    b) no

    (IF YES)
    20a. Have you ever done so by calling or meeting with citizens?
        a) yes
        b) no
    20b. Have you ever done so by contacting the press to ensure important issues are covered?
        a) yes
        b) no

    (IF YES TO BOTH)
    20c. Which would you say you have done more often?
        a) citizens
        b) media

21. Have you ever tried to explain to the public your actions in a controversial matter related to development?
    a) yes
    b) no

(IF YES)

21a. Have you ever done so by calling or meeting with citizens?

a) yes
b) no

21b. Have you ever done so by contacting reporters?

a) yes
b) no

(IF YES TO BOTH)

21c. Which would you say you have done more often?

a) citizens
b) media

22. Once decisions affecting the city's growth have been made, which is usually most useful in determining whether they have the public's support:

a) talking with citizens
b) media reports
c) others within city government

23. Which source is most likely to bring to your attention questionable practices among developers should they occur?

a) the media
b) citizens
c) others in city government

24. What would you say most likely explains why certain issues stay in the forefront of public attention?

a) city residents are very concerned about these issues
b) the news media pays undue attention to these issues
c) city officials focus attention on these issues

25. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: The issues emphasized by newspapers and television news reports are usually those issues city residents are most concerned about?

a) agree
b) disagree

26. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: The issues emphasized by newspapers and television news reports are usually those that are most important for the city?

a) agree
b) disagree

27. Have you ever been interviewed by television or newspaper reporters?

a) yes
b) no

(IF YES)
27a. How often would you say this happens on the average?
a) at least weekly
b) monthly
c) 3 or 4 times a year
d) once a year or less

28. Have you ever contacted reporters to ensure that an important story is covered?

(IF YES)
28a. How often would you say this happens on the average?
a) at least weekly
b) monthly
c) 3 or 4 times a year
d) once a year or less

29. Besides interviews, how often would you say you are quoted in the media on the average?
a) at least weekly
b) monthly
c) 3 or 4 times a year
d) once a year or less

30. Overall, would you say the media has been fair or not fair in their coverage of you?
a) fair
b) not fair

31. Do you think city council members use the presence of the media at meetings to present their views to a wider audience?
a) yes
b) no

32. How many days during the past week did you read at least one newspaper?

33. How many days during the past week did you watch at least one local television news report?

34. During how many days in the past week have you talked with citizens or community leaders about city government?

35. During how many days in the past week have you talked about city matters with others in city government?

36. Do you keep set office hours for meeting with citizens?
a) yes
b) no

37. In national politics, do you consider yourself a Democrat or Republican?
    a) Democrat
    b) Republican

    (IF DEMOCRAT)
    37a. Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or not a very strong Democrat?

    (IF REPUBLICAN)
    37b. Would you call yourself a strong Republican or not a very strong Republican?

    (IF NEITHER)
    37c. Well, do you lean more toward the Republicans or toward the Democrats?

38. Would you call yourself a liberal, a moderate or a conservative?
    a) liberal
    b) moderate
    c) conservative

39. How did you vote in the 1984 Presidential election?
    a) Reagan
    b) Mondale
    c) other
    d) did not vote
    e) don't recall
    f) ineligible to vote

40. How long have you held your present office?

41. Did you hold another public office before election?

    (IF YES)
    41a. How long?

42. How long have you been a resident of Norfolk?

43. How long have you lived in Virginia?

44. What state were you born in?

45. In what year were you born?

46. What was the last grade you completed in school?

47. What is your occupation?

48. What is your race?

49. Male or female?

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VITA

Dennis Samuel Elder

Born in Madisonville, Virginia, April 13, 1955. Graduated from Randolph-Henry Senior High School in Charlotte C.H., Virginia, June 1973. B.S., Mass Communications, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va., December 1977. Candidate for MA in Government, College of William and Mary, May 1987.

The author has worked in journalism for more than nine years, including two and a half years as editor of a smalltown weekly newspaper. Since November 1985, he has worked as Hampton city editor for the Daily Press and The Times-Herald of Newport News, Va.